

For Immediate Release

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Celebrating More than a Century of Achievement, National Wildlife Refuge System Has Measurable Benefits for Wildlife

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge System, initiated by President Theodore Roosevelt to protect bird populations from market commercial hunting, will celebrate its 103rd anniversary March 14.

Recent news events, such as the rediscovery of the presumed extinct ivory-billed woodpecker on the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas, and the dramatic return of the bald eagle herald the success of the 96-million-acre Refuge System.

Today the National Wildlife Refuge System has grown into a network of 545 refuges encompassing a wide variety of wildlife habitat types and species. There is at least one national wildlife refuge in every state and one just an hour's drive from nearly every major city.

The National Wildlife Refuge System is home to more than 700 species of birds, 220 mammals, 250 reptiles and amphibians and more than 1,000 fish. Nearly 260 threatened or endangered species are found on national wildlife refuges.

"The National Wildlife Refuge System is more than the sum of its 545 national wildlife refuges," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director H. Dale Hall. "We can quantify it with numbers about acreage and places. But what the Refuge System means to the communities that surround national wildlife refuges—and what it means to us as a nation—is impossible to quantify. National wildlife refuges offer places for traditional recreation—like hunting and fishing—and great places to just watch wildlife. So many times, the first contact that someone has with natural resources is a youth fishing day on a national wildlife refuge, or a trail walk, and it's an experience they never forget."

In 1903 President Theodore Roosevelt created the first national wildlife refuge at Pelican Island, Florida to protect brown pelicans from hunters who were slaughtering the birds to sell their feathers to commercial interests.

Celebrating the Refuge System Birthday

Across the country, Americans can see an array of wildlife, hunt, fish or photograph wild creatures in celebration of the world's greatest network of public lands dedicated to habitat conservation. Here are details of a few of the celebrations:

On Florida's east coast, at **Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge**, the Pelican Island Preservation Society will hold its 14th Annual Wildlife Festival on March 11. The refuge will offer live music, arts and crafts, and educational exhibits and programs about wildlife native to Florida. Wildlife on display will include birds of prey, alligators and snakes such as the threatened eastern indigo snake, which

is the largest nonvenomous species in North America. There will be educational activities for youngsters, and pontoon boat tours around Pelican Island.

For more information and details, call Pelican Island Refuge at 772-562-3909, or go to www.pelicanislandfriends.org.

At **Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge** on Maryland's Eastern Shore, a birding festival March 11 will celebrate more than just the birthday of the Refuge System. Newly-hatched eaglets will be stars of the online eagle cam maintained by the Friends of Blackwater. You can find the link for the Eagle Cam at www.friendsofblackwater.org.

Blackwater Refuge will offer a day of programs featuring live bald eagles, peregrine falcons and owls during their Eagle Festival. There will be bird walks, Native American music, a puppet show about endangered species and other kids' programs throughout the day. Contact Blackwater at 410-228-2677.

On March 11-12 and again March 18-19, **Aransas National Wildlife Refuge** on the Texas Gulf Coast will run guided van tours, giving visitors the chance to see endangered whooping cranes, white-tailed deer, alligators, javelina, armadillo and a variety of waterfowl and wading birds, including ibises and roseate spoonbills. Trained tour guides will talk about the refuge and its wildlife, as well as the refuge's history and how it fits into the Refuge System's program of wildlife management and protection nationwide. For more information contact Aransas Refuge at 361-286-3559 or visit the refuge Web site at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/texas/aransas/index.html>.

Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge in Vermont celebrates March 11 with a two-hour, guided Winter Nature Walk on the Maquam Creek/Black Creek Nature Trail. The refuge is located on the eastern shore of Lake Champlain near the Canadian border. Reservations are required for the walk. For more information call 802-868-4781 or visit the refuge website at <http://missisquoi.fws.gov>.

Saturday, March 25, **Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge** in Arizona hosts a two-day workshop at Brown Canyon on "The Amazing World of Insects." The fee for the workshop (including lodging and three meals) is \$78 for the general public, \$68 for members of the Friends of Buenos Aires NWR. For further information and reservations, call 520-823-4251, ext. 116.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 96-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the

Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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